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ABSTRACT

A study investigated how impulsiveness affects perceptions of risks, and examined message strategies that might be effective in reaching risk-takers. Twenty-two undergraduate subjects who scored high on a risk-taking measure/survey participated in one of four 60-90 minute focus groups in which participants discussed their health, their concerns and attitudes about environmental issues, and how they would reach others like themselves with messages about risks. Results indicated that effective messages to the impulsive risk-taker will invite spontaneity; call for a simple, one-time action that may be as brief as a phone call or letter, or as lengthy as a day long beach clean-up; and provide a clear, powerful, unavoidable image. Results demonstrated that effective communication for these risk-takers means repeated messages and images using as many media forms as budgets allow, as strong, repeated visual images attract and stick with them. Results suggest that impulsives are hard to reach, but once their attention is gained, no matter how fleetingly, they will act fast. Results also indicate, however, that their actions will not result in lasting attitudes or even much thinking following a stimulated action. (Four tables of data are included; 33 references are attached.) (PRA)

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH THE IMPULSIVE RISK TAKER: HYPOTHESES FROM FOUR FOCUS GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH THE IMPULSIVE RISK TAKER: HYPOTHESES FROM FOUR FOCUS GROUPS

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Paper presented to Public Relations Division, Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communication, Boston, MA. August 8, 1991.

Focus groups conducted with impulsive risk takers selected from a survey of 307 individuals corroborate findings from survey data and field experiments testing messages about health and the environment. Analysis of the transcripts generate hypotheses for further research on effective communication with impulsive risk takers and contribute to theory building. Messages to impulsives should invite spontaneity, call for a simple, one-time action, and provide an unavoidable image.

CONTENTS

RODUCTION ..... page 1

A Perspective on The Heedless Risk Taker

THODOLOGY ..... page 3

Selection of Subjects

Conditions of Focus Groups

Demographics of Focus Group Members

Transcriptions of Tapes

ORY AND HYPOTHESES FROM INDUCTION ..... page 10

CUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS ..... page 24

Limitations

The Impulsive in Theory

ERENCES ..... page 27

In spite of reports of increased environmentalism among the general public and growing attention to environmental issues throughout much of government and industry, some have identified what have been labeled by the advertising community as "passive" vs. "active" greens (Goldman, 1991). Those with self-reported environmental attitudes are not always translating their concerns into actions. Speculations for failures to "buy green" or continuing cynicism toward environmental messages range from charges of apathy -- a passive majority -- to deep-seeded avoidance and guilt. Resisting a "green" sales pitch may reflect rationalization or good critical thinking, but there is no doubt that reaching people with environmental information that results in desirable actions is often difficult. The same may be said for messages about healthy behaviors.

This paper assumes that developing messages to penetrate whatever may be causing resistance to attention or action begins with a better understanding of the receivers. The authors suspect that those being called passive greens may be people who are willing to take risks with their health and the environment. Understanding the motivations for risk taking may help those who have as their task communicating environmental and health risks.

Risk takers present a communication challenge for public relations intended to inform a public about risk in the environment or stimulate environmentally safe behaviors. What triggers recycling behavior in some who claim environmental concerns, but not in others? Do people engage in activities on sudden impulse, or only after thoughtful consideration? When they act in environmentally sound ways, is it because of information they received? Was the spark to act ignited by a news article, television program, radio PSA, a magazine story? What difference does it make who suggests the action when what you're looking for is the excitement associated with risks?

A risk is defined as a perception of some likelihood of negative consequences, which can include the loss of a potential reward as well as a punishment. A risk-taking predisposition occurs when individuals are not risk aversive but, in fact, like risk taking. Risk taking is a general tendency to engage in behaviors the actor understands have the likelihood of punishment or loss of reward, or other negative consequences. A risk-taking predisposition is not necessarily equated

with risk seeking; seeking of risk implies that it is the risk itself which is the end or motive rather than such things as the arousal associated with the risk, the perceived likelihood that the risk will result in a reward or the social approval which might be received from those who give attention to the risk taker.

Heedless, impulsive risk taking seems to represent a common strategy for some risk takers (Ferguson & Valenti, 1988, 1990a, 1990b, 1991). Researchers have conducted extensive studies using risk-taking constructs to explore sensation seeking. (See Zuckerman, 1964, 1985, 1988; Zuckerman & Ulrich, 1983; Fulker, Eysenck, & Zuckerman, 1980.) The Eysencks (1969, 1977, 1978, 1980) measured impulsiveness with three sub-constructs: impulsivity in the narrow sense, risk taking and non-planning. Others have considered uncertainty orientation as important to how risky situations are approached (Sorrentino & Hewitt, 1984; Sorrentino & Short, 1986; Sorrentino et al., 1988). Generalizations the authors have reported from surveys and field experiments with over 1300 subjects indicate that Impulsive risk takers are likely to be young, females, have relatively low levels of education and income, and dislike thinking, especially about their health Valenti & Ferguson, 1991). Those with impulsive personalities have been found to emphasize feelings and intuition rather than conventional rationality (Zuckerman et al., 1972). They don't feel in control; they get depressed about their health, and believe that illness is out of their control.

Generally, impulsiveness is negatively associated with concern about both health and environmental risks. Impulsiveness interacts with source, target and format of the message to effect concern: those high in impulsiveness have the most concern for a message about a child target or an adult target from a state agency and in a brochure; lowest concern occurs for high impulsives when the EPA is the source, the target is the adult and the message is in a newspaper; or for a message from the Surgeon General, the adult as target and the message in a brochure (Ferguson & Valenti, 1988,1990a,1990b, 1991).

This paper is a third stage in answering the question of how impulsiveness affects perceptions of risks and examines messages strategies that might be effective in reaching these risk

takers. This research employs an inductive, observational approach to generating hypotheses about findings for which we have previously generated extensive empirical data. (See Groves, 1987 and Merton, 1987 for use of focused interviews and research on survey data. For a good review of focus group research in public relations, see Grunig, 1990.)

METHODOLOGY

Selection of Subjects

Public relations students in two undergraduate courses taught by the researchers identified organizations likely to attract risk takers among their memberships, or individuals believed to be risk takers. Students administered a questionnaire designed to measure three risk-taking types identified in the authors' earlier research--Adventurousness, Rebelliousness and Impulsiveness--and gather general background information. Prospective subjects were surveyed at a meeting of a campus Surfing Club and skydiving club (Gator Jumpers), at a Marine recruiting office, during a well publicized sale at a local discount department store, before a game at a Jai-Alai fronton, and at various locations on campus. Over 300 respondents completed the questionnaire.

The three-part questionnaire was designed to measure media use, risk-taking attitudes and behaviors, and general demographic information. Some 20 questions measured the respondent's use of television, radio, newspapers and magazines by asking questions such as: "In an average week, how many days would you say you read a magazine?"; "What is your one favorite magazine?"; and "How would you feel if you were not able to read your favorite magazine?".

Risk-taking was measured using 15 questions from a risk-taking measure developed by the authors and additional behavioral questions about smoking, drinking and driving habits (Valenti & Ferguson, 1990; Valenti & Ferguson, 1989; Valenti & Ferguson, 1988; Valenti, Ferguson & Melwani, 1989; Valenti, Ferguson & Melwani, 1991; Ferguson & Valenti, 1990; Ferguson & Valenti, 1988a; Ferguson & Valenti, 1988b; Ferguson & Valenti, 1987). Surveyors scored the risk-taking section of the questionnaire on the spot. Those who scored above an established base

value (above 3.4 on a scale of 1 "Very Unlike Me" to 7 "Very Like Me") on a five-item measure were invited to continue to participate in the study. Items included in the measure of Impulsive risk taking included: I often speak before thinking things out; I generally do and say things without stopping to think; I often get into a jam because I do things without thinking; Before making up my mind, I consider all the advantages and disadvantages (reverse coded); and I usually think carefully before doing anything (reverse coded). Of the 307 respondents to the questionnaire, 163 scored high in impulsive risk taking. After follow up mailings and phone contacts, 22 impulsive risk takers participated in the four focus groups reported in this paper.

Data from the completed questionnaires were entered and analyzed using the SPSS/PC+ statistical package.

Conditions of Focus Groups

Those who were identified as impulsive risk takers were invited to attend one of four scheduled focus groups. Two focus group sessions were arranged for adults (non-students), while two were designed for college students. Each of the four focus groups was conducted on a weekday evening in a comfortable conference room on campus. Chairs were arranged around one large table in the center of the room so that the Moderator and Assistant Moderator, who was in charge of the audio and video equipment, sat facing the subjects, backs to a video camera.

Students were trained by the researchers as moderators. Focus group scripts were prepared and approved before a practice meeting with the instructor prior to the actual focus group session. Scripts began with an "ice breaker" question such as "What's your favorite movie?", and then posed questions inviting them to talk about their health, their concerns and attitudes about environmental issues, and how they would reach others like themselves with messages about risks.

Each session ran from 60 to 90 minutes and was both audio and video taped. Each session included a moderator, assistant moderator and 5 to 7 subjects.

Focus group participants were called or mailed letters as reminders of the date and time, and were met at the campus site by a host student who lead them to a nearby room where

efreshments were available. While subjects completed an informed consent form, they were ngaged in informal conversation allowing the moderator to formulate a seating arrangement ased on the personality types they observed. For example, efforts were made to place and ontrol potentially "dominate talkers". (See Krueger, 1988 and Morgan, 1990 for useful guidelines nd research on focus group methodology.)

After moving into the focus group room, the moderator lead general introductions and egan the discussion with an opening question. The assistant moderator was assigned to monitor ie equipment and be on alert for serendipitous questions.

Following the session, participants were provided with additional refreshments and a token ift such as a state lottery ticket.

emographics of Focus Group Members

Focus group members included 10 males and 12 females. Tables 1 - 4 present media references, general demographic information, political and social attitudes and opinions, and risk ehaviors of the focus group members (22 Impulsive risk takers), those who scored as Impulsive sk takers on the questionnaire but who did not participate in the focus groups (N = 141), and iose respondents who scored as non-impulsives (N = 139). It should be noted that the ifferences between the Impulsive risk takers and the non-impulsives are not as great as we would ave anticipated.[1]

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[1] **A companion paper (also submitted to this meeting for presentation) reports the results of focus groups conducted with those who scored as Rebellious Risk Takers.**

ble 1. Type of Media Preferred by Impulsives in the Focus Groups, Impulsives Not in a Group and Those Who Are Not Impulsive

	Imps in a Group N=22	Imps Not in Group N=141	Not An Imp N=139
vorite TV Programs:			
News, News Magazines,Education	25.0%	19.1%	21.2%
Situation Comedies	18.2	25.5	25.5
Drama, Soaps, Movies, Docudrama	20.5	22.0	19.1
Cartoons	9.1	5.0	2.5
Family, General Entertainment	6.8	8.5	8.6
Sports Programs	2.3	6.0	8.6
None	18.2	13.8	14.4
			Chi-Square: 10.13(12), ns
vorite Newspapers:			
Local Community Paper	18.2	27.3	24.1
Campus Paper	15.9	15.2	13.7
Other State Newspapers	11.4	6.0	5.0
Miami Herald	0.0	3.9	4.3
Wall Street Journal	0.0	1.4	4.3
Tampa Times	11.4	7.1	8.3
Orlando Sentinel	0.0	4.6	3.2
Other National Newspapers	2.3	1.8	2.9
New York Times	2.3	4.3	5.0
USA Today	9.1	3.2	4.7
Other	6.8	7.8	9.0
None	22.7	17.4	15.5
			Chi-Square: 23.8(22), ns
vorite Magazines:			
Sports,Boating,Fishing,Hunting	6.8	16.3	15.1
News	6.8	6.7	6.5
Service, Trade, Professional	9.1	6.4	11.2
General Interest	4.5	6.7	6.1
Adult, Men's	4.5	4.6	2.2
Women's, Parenting	20.5	17.4	10.8
History, Public Affairs	11.4	5.7	5.0
Art, Antiques, Hobbies	0.0	0.7	1.8
Automobiles & Accessories	2.3	4.3	4.3
Other	6.8	6.0	10.8
None	22.7	16.0	18.0
No Answer	4.5	9.2	8.3
			Chi-square: 26.4(22), ns
vorite Radio Stations:			
Campus Stations	11.4	21.3	25.5
Pop, Top 40, Dance	29.5	30.1	30.2
Rock, Soul, R&B	9.1	9.2	7.6
Easy Listening	6.8	4.6	3.2
Country	6.8	5.3	4.0
Classical, Jazz	2.3	4.6	5.0
Other	11.4	6.7	6.1
None	13.6	9.6	11.5
No Answer	9.1	8.5	6.8
			Chi-square: 9.2(16), ns

Table 2. Proportion of Impulsives in the Focus Groups, Impulsives Not in a Group and Those Who Are Not Impulsive for Demographic Variables

	Imps in a Group N=22	Imps Not in Group N=141	Not An Imp N=139
Gender:			
Male	45.5%	54.3%	62.5%
Female	54.5	45.7	37.5
			Chi-square: 3.3(2), ns
Marital Status:			
Divorced,Widowed,Other	14.3	5.8	6.7
Married	14.3	18.8	17.8
Single	71.4	75.4	75.6
			Chi-square: 2.2(4), ns
Number of Children:			
[M]	.7	.3	.6
			F-ratio: 3.7(2,257), p<.026
Religion:			
Protestant	40.9	26.1	29.9
Catholic	13.6	25.4	23.1
Other	9.1	21.0	23.9
None	22.7	18.1	18.7
Jewish	13.6	9.4	4.5
			Chi-square: 8.2(8), ns
Attend Church:			
Never	22.7	33.3	34.1
Occasionally	68.2	52.2	43.7
Frequently	4.5	5.8	10.4
Regularly	4.5	8.7	11.9
			Chi-square: 6.9(6), ns
Education:			
High School or Less	18.2	16.1	13.2
Some College	72.7	65.0	58.8
Four Year Degree or More	9.1	19.0	27.9
			Chi-square: 5.7(4), ns
Occupations:			
Student	45.5	41.3	44.9
Professional, Technical	18.2	17.4	22.8
Unemployed,Homemaker,Other	18.2	18.8	14.7
Service Workers	13.6	11.6	10.3
Clerical,Craft,Sales	4.5	10.9	7.4
			Chi-square: 3.7(8), ns
Income:			
Under $20,000	86.4	77.9	70.9
$20-29,999	0.0	12.2	14.9
$30-39,999	0.0	3.1	4.5
40-49,999	13.6	6.9	9.7
			Chi-square: 6.7(6), ns
Race:			
White	86.4	83.6	81.8
Other	13.6	16.4	18.2
			Chi-square: .4(2), ns
Age:			
[M]	26.3	28.4	28.4
			F-ratio: .32(2,257), ns

Table 3. Attitudes and Opinions of Impulsives in the Focus Groups, Impulsives Not in a Group and Those Who Are Not Impulsive

	Imps in a Group N=22	Imps Not in Group N=141	Not An Imp N=139
Political Leanings:			
Conservative	31.8%	20.7%	31.9%
Moderate	13.6	25.9	28.9
Liberal	50.0	47.4	31.9
Other	4.5	5.9	7.4
			Chi-square: 10.0(6), ns
Social Concerns and Issues:			
Environment	40.9	32.8	33.6
Health	4.5	20.1	17.2
Other Social Issues	31.8	23.1	24.6
Economy	18.2	17.9	22.4
None	4.5	6.0	2.2
			Chi-square: 6.6(8), ns

Table 4. Risky Behaviors and Attitudes of Impulsives in the Focus Groups, Impulsives Not in a Group and Those Who Are Not Impulsive

	Imps in a Group N=22	Imps Not in Group N=141	Not An Imp N=139
Last Medical Checkup:			
Past Year	63.6%	58.1%	60.3%
1 to 2 year ago	9.1	18.4	18.4
2 to 3 year ago	13.6	8.1	8.8
Over 3 year ago	9.1	10.3	8.1
Don't Know	4.5	4.4	5.1
			Chi-square: 2.2(8), ns
Currently Smoke:			
Yes	52.6	47.3	37.4
			Chi-square: 3.1(2), ns
Speed Normally Drive on Clear Road:			
[M] MPH in 55 MPH zone	66.1	67.3	65.9
			F-ratio: .97(2,286), ns
Wear Seatbelts:			
Never	4.5	8.8	6.7
Occasionally	9.1	20.4	16.3
Frequently	36.4	19.7	18.5
Regularly	50.0	51.5	58.5
			Chi-square: 6.1(6), ns
Number of Drinks on the Weekend:			
Don't Drink Ever	13.6	23.7	27.3
1 to 3	63.6	17.0	25.0
4 to 6	9.1	20.0	14.4
More than 6	9.1	34.1	25.0
Other responses	4.5	5.2	8.3
			Chi-square: 26.8(8), p<.0008
Number of Drinks on a Weekday:			
Don't Drink Ever	20.0	26.4	32.7
1 to 3	13.3	43.0	26.4
4 to 6	0.0	3.3	3.6
More than 6	0.0	4.1	3.6
Other responses	66.7	23.1	33.6
			Chi-square: 18.0(8), p<.02

Impulsives prefer local newspapers, if any, and are often readers of women's or parenting magazines (Table 1). They are "grazers", flipping from channel to channel, but are more likely to watch drama, soaps, movies, docudramas, sitcoms and news on television. Their taste in music is eclectic; they listen to pop, Top 40, dance and National Public Radio programming.

As earlier research indicates, Impulsives have more children. Those who scored high in impulsiveness but were not in a focus group and those who participated in the focus groups reported having at least twice as many children ($\underline{M}$ = 0.6 & 0.7 respectively) as respondents who were not impulsives ($\underline{M}$ = 0.3) [$F(2,257)=3.7, p \leq .026$, Table 2].

Of some concern, however, is the finding that those impulsives willing to participate in the focus groups did not report as much drinking as did most impulsive risk takers. For both weekend and week day drinking, focus group impulsives reported significantly less than the expected number of alcoholic drinks (Table 4).

In the next section of this paper, direct quotes from the focus group transcripts are offered. The letter A, B, C, or D is used as a last name initial to indicate which one of the four focus groups the speaker attended.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES FROM INDUCTION

The reported spontaneous behaviors among the focus group subjects corroborates earlier research on the actions of impulsives. They talked about impulsive buying, unplanned trips and even deciding to attend the scheduled focus group discussion.[2] Ozzie C.'s view sums up the overall Impulsive philosophy: "As long as I have a good chance of

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[2] Kenny A.: "I'll call [at midnight] and say let's go to Disney and my best friend [and I] spent the night in the Mister Donut parking lot waiting for Disney World to open one morning."

Kimmie A.: "I'll see a commercial that looks good and call and see if I can get reservations, pack and go the next morning."

Deena C.: "I've been told I'm an impulsive worker, that I don't stop to say okay, I've gone far enough, I can stop now...I'll just keep going."

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surviving it, I'll try just about anything once." The Impulsive's reaction to accusations of risky behavior is likely to be: "I wasn't thinking."

Denial of impulsivity is not uncommon. Lloyd A. defended himself against those who disagreed with his attitude about the risk of AIDS. "I feel that I have the capacity to be spontaneous, but I am pretty careful," he said. He did not see himself at risk for AIDS because of his non-gay and non-IV drug use status. "It's like riding a motorcycle," he observed. "You think it's [an accident] not going to happen to me."

H1: Messages to Impulsive risk takers will be more effective if reference is made to risky behaviors or lack of restraint, but not to the impulsiveness.

Impulsive risk takers may sometimes appear to have healthy or sound environmental attitudes, or at least, report what seems to be desirable behaviors. However, as one would expect, on closer inspection, there is more impulse than deep thought at the heart of their decision making. Heather A. and Amy C., members of two different focus groups, volunteered that they were vegetarians. Heather A. clarified that she was a "vegan" meaning that she eats "no animal products whatsoever, no milk, no cheese." Although a vegetarian diet may represent a healthy choice for many people, some experts might judge a vegan diet risky business, especially for pregnant women or children. Neither of these women indicated they were pregnant, however, neither of these young women suggested they were giving much thought to their diets as health decisions, nor did they mention consulting a physician or nutritionist, but rather, said their current no-meat choices resulted from concerns about animal rights. Amy C. talked with horror about "killing animals for fur coats" and noted that such images really "click".

Sometimes I Care About Me, But I Don't Particularly Care About You

Although these Impulsives are mostly non-smokers, about half are former smokers. And, they have somewhat differing attitudes toward their own health risks and those of others. The attention even seemingly health-conscious Impulsives paid to their own health did not extend to their attitudes toward the health of others in general. "I feel that if they

[my friends] are going to smoke, it does not bother me," Heather A., a non-smoker said. "Each person is different, my friends smoke and I don't care if they smoke; it does not bother me," she emphasized. These risk takers are more likely to respond to active smoking, not passive smoking messages.

H2: Messages that aim the risk and the action to be taken directly to the reader rather than to a general population or loved others will be more effective with the Impulsive risk taker.

Take Control And Keep Your Fingers Crossed

Impulsives do not necessarily seek out dangerous activities or invite risky situations. Theirs is more of an instantaneous, covert arousal. In describing some recent activities, Kenny A. reported that while working under his house, he had suddenly decided to catch a snake he spied, even though he recognized it as a deadly coral snake. "It happened to be what I think was close to a state record snake, so I killed it . . . I saved it and will check it out tomorrow and find out," he boasted.

Jeff D. exemplified why these risk takers appear to have little concern about their health when he explained why he doesn't use sun screen lotion. "Your body could just be prone to it [cancer] you know," he rationalized. "People go for checkups and are perfectly healthy and go to checkup a year later and have cancer!" According to this impulsive risk taker, "That's why you can't worry about things you don't know are there."

These risk takers accept the possible unpleasant consequences of their impulsiveness, and they see some inevitability in health and environmental problems. But that's not about to stop them. "I have had my share of accidents," Rick B. confided, " . . . just things that happen . . . in a lot of times it could just come from being a little berserk . . . I mean I've always been able to heal and I feel good about that."[3] "Accidents will happen," they say. "You should use common sense . . . and keep your fingers crossed."

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[3] **Jill B.: "I feel pretty good about my health [even though] I eat a lot of junk food...I feel like no matter what I do, I mean I can prevent certain things from happening...but no matter ...there's all kinds of things out there that can cause cancer...I feel like I'm going to die when I die...no matter what I do to my**

H3: Messages that confront the riskiness of a situation and offer immediate individual action will be more effective with Impulsive risk takers than messages that simply discuss or avoid the risk and promote general safe behaviors.

An interesting finding about these risk takers is their sense of individual responsibility and an apparent need to demonstrate control. "You gotta take responsibility for your actions," one person commented following a discussion of media coverage of social and racial tensions. In each focus group, comments emerged about people being more accountable for their actions, and taking individual action. Kathy B. told a lengthy story about witnessing a truck driver toss litter from his window, then rushing home to look up the name of the company in the phone book to call and complain.[4]

H4: Impulsive risk takers are more likely to respond to messages that make them responsible for their actions, when action is presented as a demonstration of personal control, rather than when the action sought is presented as for the general good.

People Will Have To Die To Get Attention

Some impulsive risk takers seem less likely to get immediately involved in environmental offenses such as littering and appear to look more pessimistically at a bigger picture. Rick B. said fatalistically, "I think recycling is good but most of our consumerism is geared far much more toward expendable things like appliances . . . they can't really be

(footnote continued)

body."

Deena C.: "Heart disease runs in my family. I'm very careful about my cholesterol level, things like that. I try not to take risks where my health or personal safety is concerned, well most of the time I don't take risks...I think about the effect of things on my health in terms of drugs or alcohol before I indulge in something like that, and sometimes it stops me and sometimes it doesn't, but I'm always aware of the risks involved and I make a conscious decision to do it, or not do it."

Scott C.: "I don't think that I care too much about my health, but like I'll do something, you know, without...like the encephalitis thing. I'd go outside without thinking about mosquitoes and not care about the encephalitis, but then like if I came back inside with mosquito bites all over me, then I'd be afraid of it."

[4] Kathy B.: "It really made me mad...It's like what's the matter with you? Couldn't you just stick it in your pocket until you find a trash can? It's like people aren't really thinking so much."

recycled . . . it's going to hit home when the water gets bad and people actually die from drinking it."[5]

H5: Messages with images of dramatic events will be more effective with Impulsive risk takers than messages offering no high drama or specific dramatic event.

Dramatic events appeal to these risk takers and strike them as the only means of reaching others with an environmental or health messages. Drama is the trigger to response for these risk takers. Michelle B. suggested, "Just shut off everybody's water for a day, and then say, 'Look, this could happen one day for sure.'"[6]

Shared Risks: I'd Rather Not Be Alone

Not being the only impulsive in the crowd effects these risk takers. They are more likely to express their impulsivity when others are also involved. Ozzie C., who occasionally engages in physical and high risk sports, admitted, "I tend to like to take risks with other people more . . . I feel a lot better if I've got somebody else that's in the same boat with me, so if we're screwed up, both of us are screwed." And later in this same focus group, Deena C. confessed, "Give me a cause and let me jump on the bandwagon . . . and I tend to jump on too many bandwagons . . . maybe without fully thinking would my energy be better directed somewhere else."

H6: Messages to Impulsive risk takers will be more effective when others are perceived to be engaging in the same risk prevention behaviors rather than when the risk taker sees herself/himself as acting alone.

As if to emphasize these risk takers' sensitivity to issues, but uncertainty about personal involvement and reluctance to think too much, Joyce A. summed up a discussion

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[5] **Crystal B.: "It is going to take extreme measures and terrible things to happen like our water being contaminated for people to stand up and say 'Oh my god, look what's going on!' And then all those people who don't even care are going to be the first ones to jump up and say, 'This water is killing my kids and making my hair fall out!'"**

[6] **Crystal B.: "You really have to be militant or really bitchy or you have to go out there and you just have to stand on the street corners and be a real big, you know, exhibitionist or whatever and say, hey look at me, this is what I want you to do. And not everybody's got enough courage you know, enough energy or**

about racial conflict by saying, "I'll be glad when the world gets gray." When another person at the table mistook the reference to be a comment on aging, others clarified "no more black and white . . . intermarrying." The group then decided that everyone just "getting older" might solve some problems.

Brad C. was succinct, "It's easier to be more concerned about things that don't affect you directly." He then told a story about working at a Fortune 500 company and noticing the lack of recycling of "hundreds and thousands of pounds of paper." The job experience got him thinking about the need to recycle and he was more receptive when his brother finally motivated him to recycle at home.[7]

Free To Be Unrestrained

Some impulsive risk takers see their attitude and behavior as a justified "sense of independence or defiance." Deena C. theorized that being impulsive was to show that she is unrestrained, free to be.[8] Ozzie C. replied that he too liked to do "some things out of defiance and some just because I think they're fun . . . getting that thrill." These risk takers reflected the sheer enjoyment of taking risks.[9],[10] However, the women expressed spur-of-the-moment defiance and independence when they talked about their decisions to walk

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enough want to."

[7] Brad C.: "I just think there are more people than you think...because the problems are so overwhelming and because the number of problems are so overwhelming sometimes you think there's nothing I can do...it's really difficult to get yourself involved and try to make a difference...it's like voting...your vote makes such a small contribution...so you kind of say to yourself, I'm not going to be able to do it...everyone else isn't doing it, so why should I?"

[8] Deena C.: "I wonder if a little bit of risk taking isn't that we're telling ourselves that we're okay and that we're independent and no mosquito is going to stop me from going outside, or no societal norm is going to stop me from doing something [like walking alone at night to the library without an escort following the Gainesville murders]."

Ozzie C.: "I was really mad that the one murderer had held the whole town up...I'm going to stay [some students left town in fear]...I'm not going to let [a murder] boss me around."

[9] Susan D.: "[being spontaneous] adds some excitment to your life...you're not totally in a routine or in a rut all the time."

[10] Rick B.: "I think the nice thing about being impulsive is you don't have a chance to think about what could conceiveably happen or how you're going to relate to what could happen and you just put yourself in that situation...it's just there...it's just happening for you and it's completely new."

Ozzie C.: "I just think that things that are scary and risky are fun. I mean, I want to go skydiving. I want to do stuff like that."

along at night without an escort as recommended in a current campus safety campaign. Female Impulsives are more likely to be among those who respond to a take-back-the-night campaign.

H7: Impulsive risk takers are more likely to respond to messages that present action as a way to demonstrate defiance or independence rather than responsible or informed behavior.

H8: Messages to Impulsive risk takers that present action as a statement of self-sufficiency will be more effective than messages that promote action as interdependency or reliance on others.

H9: Messages to Impulsive risk takers that present a defiant action as a serious statement of personal beliefs rather than defiance as fun will be more effective.

Worry After The Fact

Impulsive risk takers are more likely to worry after the fact. Initially, they're more likely to spend time worrying that they're worrying too much about things. Worrying is too much like planning, and these risk takers feel planning is to be avoided. They do not see their spontaneity as stupidity, but they see time spent on worrying and planning as fruitless. Heather A. recalled a sudden urge to escape a day of haying; she hitchhiked into town and left the equipment unattended in the field.

H10: Messages that urge action now--such as take a chance--and worry later will be more effective with Impulsive risk takers than messages that don't urge immediate action or allow for a delay before acting.

H11: Messages that offer ways to block out worrying or postpone worrying about an action will be more successful than messages that do not.

Don't Think, Act

Actually, Impulsives are as much the "Don't Worry, Be Happy" crowd as they are the "Don't Think, Act" gang. "I abuse my body with food," Keith D. told the group. "I will eat anything; I don't worry about low fat, cholesterol, salt . . . I figure if I die by the time I'm forty, who cares? All you are over forty is just sick anyway." Yet, he complained about his problems with allergies and a "bad sinus problem." He later confessed he occasionally skimmed health articles--perhaps looking for a quick cure?--but got bored easily and skipped to the sports pages. As Jimmy D. said, "You don't think about something, you just decide to do it."[11]

H12: Messages that offer immediate solutions will be more effective with the Impulsive than messages that invite thinking or long-term problem-solving.

H13: Impulsive risk takers are more likely to respond to a message that provides an address for letter writing than to one that does not.

The era of the 800 number is well suited to impulsive risk takers. These are people who prefer an immediate spontaneous response such as picking up the phone for information. Ozzie C. talked about the satisfaction after cleaning something up and seeing a positive result.[12] It may be a need for instant gratification . . . or the momentum is lost.

H14: Impulsive risk takers are more likely to respond to a message that provides a telephone number, particularly a 24-hour 800 number, than to those that do not.

H15: Messages that emphasize immediate solutions,without thinking will be more effective with Impulsive risk takers than messages that require thinking.

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[11] **Keith D.: "I've always had these weird feelings that usually your first choice is your best choice...the more I think about it, the more I think myself into my own problem, so I just act...I do things a lot better."**

[12] **Jill B.: "Well if I have a question about my health I usually call my doctor...if he doesn't have specific answers for me he tells me where to go to find them...and if my questions are on the environment, well...you look in the yellow pages...call and ask."**

Kathy B.: "It's like you call the Department of Health or... an 800 number...it's sitting on my desk at work...it's toxics...a toxic substance hotline... you can call and ask about anything...they send you those computer printouts that's like a good half an inch thick...and it talks about the major uses, where it comes

What seems apparent here is unclear thinking with immediate action. Conversation that begins with "smoking cancer-sticks" and the environmental hazards caused by chemical or oil spills as the general topic is punctuated with expected references to EXXON and DOW, but also becomes fragmented with asides about "the radiation bombarding" from television, "major holes in the ozone", and getting AIDS from discarded condoms in landfills.[13] "Everything can be turned in and on itself," Kathy B. mused. "One way or another, they are Catch 22's." Clearly, to these impulsives everything is "out of control." As Heather D. said, "I don't think about [skin cancer] . . . I think about getting a tan." This same young woman during a discussion of AIDS also admitted that for some time "her friends" thought condoms weren't really necessary if you were on the pill. It was not until she began to see AIDS as "an epidemic" that her view changed.

H16: Seemingly disconnected, eclectic or weird messages that appear to offer little hope will be more effective with Impulsiverisk takers than clear and optimistic but lengthy prose.

Amy C. seemed representative of the impulsives; she spoke in fragmented sentences and frequently allowed others in the group to interrupt her thoughts. It is not surprising then that such folks came up with ill-conceived notions about using death row prisoners for drug and chemical testing, immediately stopping all logging completely, and forcing "everybody to stand out in acid rain."

Oftentimes discussions with impulsives begins to sound like stream of consciousness with everyone trying to follow the nonflowing logic. Some points may sound right, but nothing quite hangs together. Apparently this random thought process with missing linking thoughts is the acceptable norm for impulsives. Their dislike of thinking manifests as buckshot; they aim and hit the general target, but it may be obliterated in the process. This

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from...all kinds of stuff."

[13] Kathy B.: "They're (condoms) not biodegradable, you can't reuse them, you can't recycle them, but they have a shelf life of god knows how long and they end up in landfills or sewage systems."

seeming lack of clarity may add to confusion for some, but it is what the impulsive risk taker wants. Key peripheral cues and perhaps even a smattering of unconnected central points, and the impulsive is ready for action.[14]

H17: Messages that offer simple, convenient solutions to a problem, even when the problem identified involves complicated environmental science, will be more effective for Impulsive risk takers than messages that recommend complex solutions and further information seeking for problem solving.

A spontaneous personal connectedness to messages also translates into their reports of what they feel they can best do to solve problems. Kathy B. advocated writing letters.[15] In support of her belief that people will listen better to their own kindred network, Kathy reported to the group that she had written letters to the local newspaper and had a letter printed in a special interest magazine ("Florida Sportsman"). Her letter urged boaters to slow down to help prevent erosion.

H18: Impulsive risk takers will be more responsive to messages that trigger recall of a specific event they have experienced rather than messages with no specific event referenced.

Impulsive risk takers appear to require an immediate, powerful, but perhaps strange, attention getter linked to an immediate, simple action, sort of MTV style message. There may be no likely long term effect and no triggering of real thinking, but the initial behavior is established. As Deena C. commented, " . . . the facts aren't going to stick, but just maybe the smashing glasses and the skeletons will." If facts are included in a message, they'll have to be shocking, extreme, perhaps even insulting.

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[14] Ozzie C.: "I saw a commercial saying that hundreds of thousands of people or so are killed every year by a frying pan and it has a woman carrying a frying pan...it looks like she's going to hit this guy over the head, then she scoops food off onto his plate and the grease runs down...Having it shoved right into my face kind of thing...make it seem real ominous like that...like the one where they show the person [killed by drunk driving] in a grave and someone shovelling dirt in over him...Throwing it right in your face...shovelling it right in your face. That's how I would do it [get action from an impulsive risk taker]."

[15] Kathy B: "I'm going to write letters and say things...If we don't like the way things are, it's up to us to change them...and I can use my phone for that...tell these people who are in positions of power that you're just not going to put up with it anymore."

I Hate the Government

As the authors' earlier research indicates, impulsive risk takers do not trust government and justify some of their behaviors by pointing to government complicity or suspect federal agency involvement in a health or environmental campaign. They pointed out that "people" recycle but product shelf life is planned and orchestrated. Kathy B. angrily noted that the government puts a higher premium on machines for killing than for research to save lives.[16] Crystal B., a hair stylist, reaffirmed the perception of government and industry disregard for health and the environment with tales of cosmeticians as human guinea pigs.[17]

Impulsives can be quite direct in their disrespect for government. "I hate the government," Lloyd A. said. " . . . [a] mismanaged bunch of idiots . . . they've created the problem [waste and pollution] . . . what does that tell me?" Others agreed.[18]

H19: Messages that appeal to Impulsives as voters or citizens who participate in the government will be less effective than messages that acknowledge that they are alienated from government and unlikely to vote.

H20: Messages seen as part of a political campaign are less likely to be effective with Impulsive risk takers than messages that are not.

H21: Messages attributed to government officials are less likely to be effective with Impulsive risk takers than messages attributed to non-government sources.

Rather than government sources for information, impulsives turn to word-of-mouth

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[16] **Kathy B.: "AIDS research has been cut back to the bone because they don't think it is important enough. They're [the government] too busy building fricking tanks that'll wipe out a whole village of people who are absolutely no threat to anybody here...now where is the logic in that?"**

[17] **Crystal B.: "If they [cosmetic industry and FDA] want to market new products, the hair dressers are the ones that the products are tested on for medical research...I don't have a problem with animal testing!"**

[18] **Kenny A.: "I'll tell you why I don't recycle. Because what do they [government] do? They say we'll make X number of dollars from recycling and look how good it's going to do and that's more money for them to misappropriate and your trash bill still keeps going up, up, up...the government is 95 percent of the problem."**

from people they say they know and respect, although that can include celebrities. They report being influenced by people they have not met personally, but respect, and mention specifically some media personalities.[19] Margret D. said she would be more inclined to believe a state or government agency about health risks, then specifically mentioned " . . . like you know, the World Health Organization."

Governments Allow You to Pollute

These risk takers did share some concern for the environment, but were perplexed and sometimes angry at inconsistencies or injustices they perceived. They felt government allowed businesses to pollute and encouraged a throw-away society. "I think it's kind of sad how as powerful as the United States is, they sit around and they take studies and stuff instead of doing something about it," Tommy C. commented. Their environmental worries belied their usual don't-worry-be-happy mood.[20]

If It's In the Newspaper It's Wrong . . . Maybe

Impulsives say they find newspapers unreliable and are especially critical of local news, although they are more likely to read local newspapers if they attend to newspapers at all. In one focus group all agreed that nothing they read in newspapers was correct and decided cynically that newsprint offered a fine opportunity for recycling if you didn't cancel your subscription.[21]

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[19] **Lloyd A.: "Certain news representatives like MacNeil and Lehrer and those kind of guys, and certain, you know, Zbigniew Brezezinski I think is a sharp guy. You know, an honest guy. Guys like that I've never met...I just met 'em on the tube."**

[20] **Susan D.: "I can't believe it's [tropical rain forests] going to be destroyed before we ever know about any of it, and then you see what they leave behind and it's nothing."**

Keith D.: "I mean companies will just throw these things in lakes and they're leaking and they're destroying our lakes and things like that."

Margret D.: "I think the companies that create the waste or that help create it should make a community effort with some subsidy from the government, but I really don't think [they think] it's their role."

[21] **Lloyd A.: "You know whatever I know about a news story in the [local] newspaper, it's always wrong. I mean I hate to say always, but...I mean, the facts are wrong."**

Kenny A.: "I agree 150 percent! I've worked a lot of disasters and things in the past seven years [as a firefighter] and I would say 90 percent of the articles I've read are written wrong, had misinformation or they twisted it to make it something that it wasn't...I don't know where they get their information from...or who they talk to."

One group member offered as ambitious overall media change plan. Rick B. recommended the following plan to please Impulsives:

"I [think you need to become] the permanent editor of all the newspapers . . . there wouldn't be anymore articles 'Joe Schmoe gets killed in back alley' . . . I think there's enough of that in the news already . . . there's too much . . . I would replace that with more health and environmentally oriented articles . . . not only bad stuff that's happening, but also the good stuff . . . I would change what the newspapers print."

References were made about the effectiveness of full page, large type newspaper ads and particularly effective editorial cartooning. One example offered was Auth's crying muppets after Henson's death; Impulsives saw the image as one of credible passion.

H22: If newspapers are used in an information campaign aimed at Impulsive risk takers, a message in a full page ad will be more effective than a news article, feature story, commentary or editorial.

H23: An editorial cartoon or comic strip will be more effective with Impulsive risk takers than a news article, feature story or commentary.

Comments indicated that much of these risk takers' information, particularly about AIDS, came from television. A particular **60 Minutes** program was mentioned and recognized by others. The college students had been exposed to a year long, campus wide condom campaign that included posters in dorms, talks by residence advisers, campus newspaper articles and widespread distribution of free condoms. Several focus group members used the term "STDs" during the discussions. One reported having decorated her dorm room door with red and green condoms for the holidays, while others (non-students) were more conservative about sexually transmitted disease (STD) information, and felt there was little response to televised public service announcements.[22] They were more comfortable advocating a return to the past--old movies on television or reruns of

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[22] **Kenny A.: "I don't like some of the advertisements I've seen on TV, but I'm old fashioned and I'll always be old fashioned."**

programming--as a means of escape to better times.[23]

H24: Messages embedded in nostalgia, such as footage from early television programming or old films, will be more effective with Impulsive risk takers than messages in contemporary programming or current films.

H25: Messages that are seen as iconoclastic or peculiar will be more effective with Impulsive risk takers than messages that are traditional or standard.

H26: Recall of TV PSAs with a musical message or strong image will be higher for Impulsives than text-based, scripted messages or non-visual images.

Kenny A. reported that he finds television boring. "I watch it, but I spend 80 percent of the time watching it flipping the channels, trying to find something worth watching and there's not [anything] there," he said. Others also expressed inattention to television.[24] However, recall of advertising content or images seemed quite specific, especially for currently popular commercials. They could easily quote ad copy and remember the music, yet all denied that advertised messages work. Ironically, one person told a story intended to reinforce the "forgetfulness" of advertising, and essentially demonstrated the power of ad images for impulsives.[25]

Amy C. spent some time talking about her involvement with the tuna boycott after viewing a video about dolphins being trapped and drowned; she signed a petition and worked actively with an environmental group after that. She had seen the triggering video not on television but in a group setting organized by a visiting task force in charge of the

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[23] **Kenny A.: "I think society is really starting to reach back for the past because there's so much commotion and turmoil in the world today...'Leave It To Beaver' and 'Andy Griffith'...hold my attention a lot faster than one of these sitcoms today."**

Heather A.: "Because it's [the past] much nicer and it's much more pleasant..it's simple."

Joyce A.: "It's more home."

Kimmie A.: "They had morals. It's refreshing."

[24] **Joyce A.: "Well, we have a satellite dish out in the yard. It's been broken for a year and a half. We've really missed TV, [but] we haven't bothered getting it fixed."**

[25] **Jill B.: "This one commercial...to this day I can't remember the name of the cereal, but it was where the squirrel is coming out of the airplane...and I went to the store and I said, 'I am looking for the cereal where the little squirrel is coming out of the plane...it's crackers, crackles, cracks something'...and I still had the name wrong [Nut Clusters]." She added, "I pour that with my Tony the Tiger cereal."**

boycott. Real people bringing a message, and sharing the experience with acquaintances in a small audience seemed more appealing to her, and others agreed.

H27: Messages aimed at Impulsive risk takers will be more successful when communicated through special interest groups rather than through general mass media sources.

Tommy C., a college freshman who was the quietest in his focus group, said he considered "a powerful voice" the most important characteristic of any message. "I was going to mention the Surgeon General," he said, "because his commercials kind of made you think."

Radio appeared to be a useful medium, and like television or print media, can provide 800 telephone numbers. Primarily, radio is valued by impulsives for good music in spite of differences in musical tastes (jazz, classic, country and one "rock 'n roll grandma"), although, the clear preference is for "positive messages" in songs.

H28: Radio PSA's offering 800 numbers or messages embedded in a popular song will be more effective for Impulsive risk takers than radio news about risk.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Before conducting this series of focus groups, we believed the Impulsive Risk Takers, as opposed to Rebellious or Adventurous Risk Takers, presented the greatest challenge to communicators. Of the three risk-taking types identified over this four-year research program, those who scored highest in Impulsive risk taking seemed to offer no clear advantage in manipulation of source, targeting of risk or variation of formats to improve messages aimed at them. Impulsives are unpredictable and unwilling to attend to messages about risks to their health or risk in the environment. How, we wondered, can communicators reach people who don't care about thinking or information, and don't find

any sources of any kind particularly credible? What lies beneath their lack of caring? What do they care about, if anything? How does feeling out of control interfere with their receptiveness to information? And, who are the Impulsive males? How can we reach them? The non-thinking, abrupt and heedless nature reported by these receivers seemed antithetical to any information campaign.

Limitations

In addition to the problems presented by the lack of randomness in how these risk takers decided to participate in focus groups, it should be noted that the goal was to involve a minimum of 7 risk takers in each focus group, however, in spite of verbal commitment and in some instances even a written consent, we found that Impulsives are not the most reliable research subjects. Apparently, deciding whether to follow through and actually show up for a "date" was a matter of chance for these risk takers.

The Impulsive in Theory

Listening to these risk takers talk about themselves confirmed that Impulsives are very likely not to take preventive measures against known health risks, but they do hear some messages, and they are more likely to listen to information from health organizations or "respected" celebrities that provide a quick fix. **Oftentimes, they do care about their health or the environment, although, their actions are likely to be more spontaneous and emotional responses rather than well thought-out attitudes. They don't want to be "preached at" or asked to give much thought to decisions; they take chances and would rather react with immediacy and "see what happens."** Facts are fine if simple and to the point, and preferably dramatic. But emotional appeals are fine too. As Keith D. warned, "I don't want to hear just the cold facts." These are people who act on first impressions, go with their first thought or feeling and seldom spend time considering the consequences of their actions. These are the folks who will use the "free sample" without reading the label carefully.

It is important to understand that impulsiveness, although often characterized as the

result of non-thinking, may actually reflect an attitude that has developed over time and is not well defined, but because of some genuine reflection. As Deena C. said, "No societal norm is going to stop me from doing anything." **Impulsiveness offers a way to defy authority or the means to demonstrate discontentment or dissatisfaction with things that are confusing.** Impulsives appear to lack the self-esteem that leads to rebellious risk taking, but they are nonetheless, sending their own messages through their impulsive behaviors. "I'm mad as hell and going shopping" is more likely to be the Impulsive's response. The point is that these risk takers are taking actions, and those actions are influenced if not stimulated by their predisposed impulsivity. Messages to them should aim to tap into effective impulsive stimulants and promote actions that are reasonable to them. "Shop 'til you drop" and "Take back the night" seem to be the sort of slogans to which these risk takers could respond. A message that builds defiance into a spontaneous action ought to be effective with these risk takers.

Effective messages to the impulsive risk taker will invite spontaneity, call for a simple, one-time action that may be as brief as a phone call or letter, or as lengthy as a day long beach clean up, and provide a clear, powerful, unavoidable image. Effective communication for these risk takers means repeated messages and images using as many media forms as budgets allow. Strong, repeated visual images attract and stick with them. **Impulsives are hard to reach, but once their attention is gained, no matter how fleetingly, they will act fast.** Do not, however, count on lasting attitudes or even much thinking following a stimulated action. Follow up with these risk takers will be unending.

Each of the hypotheses generated in these focus group discussions can be easily tested. More successful methods of providing information to these risk takers can be developed. Effective communication to Impulsive Risk Takers requires only that we not fall into stereotyping or generalities, but take the time to understand them better.

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